

Draft Resource Conservation Challenge (RCC) June Meeting Summary Held June 20, 2003 at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Arlington, VA

This document summarizes the key themes that were discussed at the June 20, 2003 Resource Conservation Challenge (RCC) Stakeholders meeting. Attachments to this summary include the meeting agenda, a list of invitees/attendees, a slide presentation about the RCC, a discussion paper on drivers, tools and incentives, and the two-page RCC flyer.

Background

The RCC, initiated in September, 2002, is a cross-Agency, national effort to find flexible, yet more protective ways to conserve resources. The RCC is designed to promote collaborative problem solving and represents a significant shift at EPA to achieve cross-media and multimedia environmental protection. A core group of representatives from EPA, states and tribes has been working together to establish broad goals, objectives and strategies to guide the RCC. The core group has identified a number of opportunities for near-term progress towards achievement of the RCC goals. Each of these opportunities has been assigned a leader and a "cluster" of other individuals to refine and realize the opportunity for success. The purpose of this June meeting was to get input from a broad range of external stakeholders about their expectations and needs regarding RCC direction and partnerships.

Participants

Approximately 110 representatives from the business community (trade associations and individual companies); environmental groups, universities, public interest organizations, non-governmental organizations, states, local governments, tribal governments, EPA and other federal agencies attended the meeting. The group reflected a broad range of interests, understandings of the RCC, and expectations for the meeting. Some stakeholders had just learned about the RCC over the past few days and wanted to discuss broad goals, concepts and direction. Others have been participating actively with cluster groups to develop specific RCC objectives and partnerships. These participants wanted to engage in further dialog about developing specific partnerships. EPA participants also represented a range of involvement in the RCC at the Headquarters and regional level.

Opening Remarks

Linda Fisher, Deputy Administrator, in a video presentation, expressed the Agency's enthusiastic support for the RCC. Ms. Fisher said that the RCC is intended to shift materials management strategies toward conservation by designing products and processes that minimize waste, by collecting waste products and reusing them, and by using all input materials, including energy, more efficiently. The RCC is a challenge to businesses, research institutions, NGOs, communities, and individuals to rededicate themselves to conservation in their daily lives and find new ways to conserve resources.

The RCC also is a challenge to EPA, the states, and Tribal governments to coordinate resource conservation efforts across programs, across environmental media, and across different levels of government to support a national conservation ethic in a seamless way.

Marianne Horinko, Assistant Administrator, Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response, said that the RCC provides an opportunity to shape a new direction in conservation built on materials lifecycle considerations, waste minimization, reuse and recycling. Ms Horinko emphasized her commitment to building strong partnerships across the Agency, particularly with the Offices of Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances (OPPT), Policy, Economics and Innovation (OPEI), Enforcement and Compliance Assurance (OECA), Water and Air. Ms. Horinko said the RCC requires both a long-term effort to realign EPA programs around resource conservation, and a shorter-term effort with specific, identified industry sectors (the cluster groups) to realize near-term conservation goals. She encouraged the participants to provide feedback on the overall RCC framework. She also encouraged those involved with the existing cluster groups to use this opportunity to continue networking and to begin to develop specific partnerships that will lead to measurable short term conservation benefits.

Susan Hazen, Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator, Office of Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances, said that RCC represents a renewed Agency commitment to pollution prevention. She encouraged participants to join EPA in finding creative and innovative ideas to meet conservation challenges, while at the same time continuing to improve compliance with existing environmental laws and avoiding cross medial pollution transfers. Ms. Hazen emphasized that through the RCC, the principles of pollution prevention, waste minimization, and conservation of resources will be applied in the context of a number of relevant environmental statutes, not only the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), but also the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), the Clean Water Act, and the Clean Air Act. The RCC presents an opportunity to meet specific, measurable conservation goals by breaking down internal “stovepipes” and using new, more integrated and comprehensive approaches.

RCC Concepts and Building Blocks

David Hockey, Acting Director, Resource Conservation Challenge (RCC), gave a presentation on the background and structure of the RCC.

The RCC is a response to new opportunities to increase environmental protection, long-term economic health, and quality of life through materials lifecycle management and sustainable business practices. The RCC provides a structure within which EPA, the states, and their partners can begin to position themselves to address the environmental problems we will be facing over the next 20 years. It is designed to increase awareness of product lifecycle management and move towards more holistic, materials management approaches within government, in the business and manufacturing communities, and in consumer trends and choices by bringing sustained

Agency focus to achievement of ambitious resource conservation “challenges” (or conservation goals). The RCC has identified three broad goals.

- Prevent pollution and promote recycling and reuse of materials
- Reduce the use of priority chemicals at all life stages
- Increase energy and materials conservation

Mr. Hockey explained that the RCC is based on six key building blocks.

- *“Challenges” to address specific national environmental problems through voluntary partnerships*

Voluntary partnerships have the potential to achieve significant conservation benefits beyond current regulatory approaches. RCC partners may include states, local governments, businesses, NGOs or universities. RCC partnerships are intended to recognize and enhance existing partnerships and identify new challenges. The “challenge” is also to individual consumers to incorporate a resource conservation ethic into decisions about purchasing and use of energy and materials.

- *Measurable outcomes to drive environmental improvement*

EPA challenges its partners in the states and the business community to identify ambitious, measurable resource conservation goals and draw upon the opportunities created by new ways of thinking about how to enhance our long-term economic position and protect our environment from wastes and chemicals. Identifying measurable outcomes will help the partnerships make real progress toward conservation goals and build support for the RCC approach.

- *Agency coordination & alignment to meet challenges*

For those willing to accept this challenge, the Agency, at the highest level, commits to mobilize its institutional resources to bring sustained, focused, and internally aligned attention and responsive decision-making to achieving these goals. The Agency has established a structure behind the RCC that cuts across programmatic boundaries, and will integrate RCC goals into its strategic planning, budgeting, and performance reporting responsibilities.

- *Materials life cycle approaches, not just end of pipe solutions*

RCC partnerships will use material flow and life cycle approaches to solve national environmental problems. This approach places a greater emphasis on “beginning of life” approaches, such as product stewardship. Consistent with this approach, the Agency will also challenge every American to take one small step each day to conserve our natural resources by acting on a resource conservation ethic in decisions about the products they buy and how they use energy and materials. The RCC recognizes the power of consumers to influence material flow stages related to product use and disposal, and demand changes at the production stage.

- *Appropriate tools to influence change in behavior*

EPA will work with its partners (including other federal agencies, states, NGOs, businesses, and individual consumers) to create a harmonized set of drivers and incentives throughout entire product value chains to motivate and enable businesses, communities, and consumers to take steps and change behavior to meet resource conservation challenge goals.

- *Elevation of ideas from the local/state/regional level to national focus and from one business to an entire industry sector.*

RCC won't have the resources to focus everything at once. It will be looking for national environmental problems that present opportunities for significant conservation achievements. It will also be looking for opportunities to expand and elevate successful local solutions to higher level where greater benefits can be achieved.

The RCC is built upon the concept of voluntary partnerships. For those who choose to enter into partnerships, EPA can provide a number of incentives, including coordination and alignment of Agency programs and decision making, attention of Agency senior management, recognition of new resource conservation activities, and technical assistance. The Agency intends to integrate the measurable resource conservation challenge goals established through voluntary partnerships into its annual planning and budgeting cycles.

Mr. Hockey provided several examples of how current RCC clusters groups are using RCC concepts and building blocks to address challenges in the area of electronics, construction and demolition debris, and scrap tires. He asked participants to identify other areas of opportunity for new RCC challenges.

A copy of Mr. Hockey's RCC presentation is attached to this summary.

Reactions to RCC Building Blocks

After Mr. Hockey's presentation, stakeholders from industry, NGOs, states, tribes and local government offered their views and reactions to the RCC during a facilitated panel discussion.

Panel members included:

- Allan Abramson, EPA's Office of Prevention, Pesticides, and Toxic Substances
- John Aquino, Tribal Association for Solid Waste and Emergency Response
- Jay Benforado, EPA's Office of Policy, Economics, and Innovation
- Michael Blumenthal, Rubber Manufacturer's Association
- Barry Breen, EPA's Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response
- Frank Coolick, Association of State and Territorial Solid Waste Management Officials
- Leonard Fasullo, DuPont Titanium Dioxide Global Business Unit
- John Flatley, National Performance Track Association

- Pamela Gratton, Fairfax County Division of Solid Waste Collection and Recycling
- Phyllis Harris, EPA's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance
- Laura Hickey, National Wildlife Federation
- Nigel Howard, U.S. Green Building Council
- Gary Miller, Illinois Waste Management and Research Center
- Ed Pinero, Office of the Federal Environmental Executive
- Natalie Roy, The Environmental Council of the States
- Deborah Savage, Tellus Institute
- Bill Sheehan, Grassroots Recycling Network
- Bob Springer, EPA's Office of Solid Waste
- Ken Zarker, National Pollution Prevention Roundtable

The panel engaged in a dialog about what would be needed to establish a clear conceptual framework for the RCC and also use the initiative to make progress towards specific short term conservation objectives. In the afternoon, the full stakeholder group, including the morning panelists, participated in additional discussion about the RCC. The following summary reflects both the morning and afternoon discussions, and is organized around the RCC building blocks.

“Challenges” to address specific national environmental problems through voluntary partnerships.

- Participants expressed broad support for the “challenge” concept
- They also recognized that each voluntary partnership will have a different set of expectations, partners, and objectives
- Partnerships must be sufficiently broad and dynamic to include partners that can contribute to meeting the objectives. In some cases they may need to be broad enough to include appropriate industries, federal, state and local agencies, NGOs, industrial designers, retail and consumer groups, universities, and other non-traditional groups. Partnerships will be more likely to meet their objectives if they are considered to be “living” documents. Parties should share information and maintain frequent contact. Improved communications, as a result of partnerships, can lead to technical advances which can reduce costs and improve environmental performance.
- Some participants expressed skepticism about the track record and effectiveness of past voluntary efforts and suggested that voluntary partnerships should complement, not replace, regulatory programs. EPA's Office of Compliance and Enforcement Assurance (OECA) reported that voluntary programs often result in improved regulatory compliance. OECA supports voluntary programs, such as compliance assistance centers, that work with specific sectors to solve environmental problems.
- Partnerships will need active support from EPA, Congress and other key parties. New initiatives, such as RCC, often need funding and/or legislation to be successful.

- EPA will also have to build strong internal partnerships with offices, programs and regions.
- States should be active participants in RCC partnerships

Measurable outcomes to drive environmental improvement

- EPA should develop high level RCC goals that are clear, well-defined, and quantifiable
- Cluster level objectives, or performance measures, should be used to measure progress towards the high level goals
- RCC partnerships should carefully choose a measurement parameter that will target the desired behavior change
- RCC should ensure that only new progress toward objectives will be measured. Credit should not be given for existing activities.
- Clusters should establish “stretch” objectives that are ambitious. One participant suggested that objectives should provoke a “gasp or a smile, not a yawn.”
- RCC partnerships should establish meaningful consequences for failing to achieve objectives

Agency coordination and alignment to meet challenges

- EPA must demonstrate a capacity to align resources within the Agency and with state partners
- EPA should clarify the unique benefits created by operating under the RCC umbrella
- EPA should help companies who are working towards RCC goals make sense of regulatory complexity by connecting regulatory approaches to solving real environmental problems or making real environmental gains.
- EPA should establish an institutional structure to promote cross-agency coordination
- EPA should articulate to stakeholders how RCC will interact with other programs and offices. For example, companies that currently participate in the WasteWise program will need to evaluate the benefits of developing a broader RCC partnership to address other waste streams or energy-related issues.

Material life cycle approaches, not just end of pipe solutions

- RCC should maintain the pollution prevention hierarchy and emphasize source reduction and product stewardship, not just reuse and recycling. Without a major shift to “front end” solutions, it is unlikely that the RCC will meet its long term goals.
- RCC should include education and outreach strategies aimed at changing consumer behavior
- Life cycle approaches will also help identify the cross-media and energy-related impacts of alternative conservation strategies. An integrated approach will help avoid shifts in impacts to other media or other geographic areas. For example,

some input substitutions can result in use of other toxic materials. One participant related how scrap tires from the U.S. were piling up across the border in Mexico.

- Some participants argued that producers should be responsible for the life cycle impacts of their products
- Life cycle approaches should be ambitious. For example, on municipal waste issues, RCC should support programs that eliminate unnecessary packaging, create paperless offices, or reduce “junk” mail.

Appropriate tools to influence change in behavior

- Federal purchasing power should be used to encourage development of environmentally preferable products. This power can be leveraged by coordinating standards development with state and local partners, and major national retailers
- Participants recognized that each partnership will require different types of assistance, incentives, or tools
- Some existing groups, such as the Pollution Prevention Roundtable, may have an important role to play in the RCC

Elevation of ideas from the local/state/regional level to national focus

- Pilot projects are designed test innovative ideas. They have a limited ability to contribute to achieving RCC goals
- RCC should identify successful pilot programs that can be applied to national problems by expanding them to other sectors or geographic areas
- RCC partnerships should result in national-level environmental benefits
- EPA should develop a more aggressive outreach strategy that includes using the RCC website to communicate to a broader group of stakeholders and planning regional outreach meetings, i.e., taking RCC “on the road.”

Other Recommendations

In addition to comments that could be specifically related to the RCC building blocks, stakeholders made a number of suggestions on how EPA can provide further leadership on the RCC.

- Make progress simultaneously on both high-level RCC program development and project-level, or “cluster” objectives
- Describe a clear, long-term vision for resource conservation and articulate it to the public
- In the short term, provide a model for industry and the public by adopting sustainable practices, such as environmentally preferable purchasing, construction of green buildings, reuse and recycling of materials.

- Establish a clear, process “road map” for participation in the RCC. Participants recognized that early stages of RCC program development will be confusing, but it will be important to quickly clarify the steps for engaging in partnerships.
- Continue to leverage the connection of the RCC to the 20-year vision for the RCRA program and use the RCC to work towards this vision
- Focus on the initial cluster areas. Develop partnerships quickly to support 2003 objectives.
- Continue searching for new challenges by establishing criteria and talking to stakeholders about additional opportunities
- Conduct research and collect data to support RCC broad goals. One example that was raised by attendees was the need to provide consumers with information about toxics contained in products. The current TRI program only provides information about toxic releases, which supports “end of pipe” solutions.
- Support infrastructure development at the regional and state level to implement partnership activities. EPA should provide education and training to state and local agencies about RCC goals and strategies.

Meeting participants recognized that additional dialog between EPA, partners and stakeholders will be important on two levels as the initiative moves forward. At the programmatic level, the RCC will need greater clarification of its broad goals and processes so potential partners will understand how to get involved. Also, to make progress towards meeting the specific “challenges” that have already been selected, partnerships will need to be established quickly to identify measurable objectives, and begin working on the changes needed to meet the challenge. Efforts at these two levels will need to be connected, as progress on each level will inform the other.